



Asian & Pacific Islander American Vote - Michigan

**Written Testimony for Michigan State House Redistricting and Elections Committee  
regarding SB 751 and SB 754**

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Good morning Chairman Lund and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Stephanie Gray Chang and I am the board president for Asian & Pacific Islander American Vote – Michigan.

Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote – Michigan is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that serves the Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) community through civic participation, advocacy, and education. At 2.97% of Michigan's population, our state's 293,766 APIAs<sup>1</sup> are the fastest-growing population while other populations are declining.

Our mission is to serve the APIA community through civic participation, advocacy, and education. In our relatively short history, we have registered approximately 1500 individuals to vote, the vast majority from the APIA community. The APIA community faces many challenges to participating in our country's democracy – language barriers, lack of familiarity with the political process, and, sometimes, distrust of government due to the history of home country political corruption.

For that reason, APIA community voter registration rates tend to hover around 50-60 percent, significantly lower than that of other communities. Once registered, APIA voters do turn out to vote at high rates. It is clear that the assistance APIAVote-Michigan and other nonprofit organizations provide to potential voters in taking the first step to complete the voter registration form and in providing information about the election process and voting rights is critical.

Now, Senate Bill 754 would make it more difficult for organizations to increase civic participation and engage residents in the democratic process. SB 754 goes against what the United States stands for by creating barriers to involvement in democracy and the organizations that strive to make this possible for marginalized communities across the state. APIAVote-Michigan opposes unnecessary impediments to a constitutional right for all citizens.

The bill mandates that organizations engaged in voter registration efforts provide an extensive amount of information, including the name and address of every agent of the organization who is helping to register voters in Michigan. Any changes in the information they submit must be reported promptly to the Department of State as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Includes Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander – both alone and multiracial. Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Census 2010.

In addition, someone from the organization will be required to attend a training developed by the Secretary of State, and is then required to train all other members of the organization registering voters. The bill does not specify where or how the trainings will be offered, making them vague and presumably inaccessible.

Lastly, voter registration forms gathered by the organization within a week of an election must be turned in to the election authorities within one business day. These requirements are arduous stipulations adding an unreasonable burden to small nonprofits like ours who rely mostly on volunteers to increase the voter registration and participation rate in our community.

Senate Bill 751 would make it harder to engage residents in the democratic process more difficult by requiring no reason absentee voters to pick up their ballot in person with state identification.

Currently, the following populations are exempt from this requirement and can receive their ballot by mail or online—those 60 or older, expect to be away while polls are open, are physically unable to get to the polls, in jail awaiting arraignment or trial, can't attend for religious reasons, or will be working as a election official in another precinct.

Eleven percent of Americans surveyed do not have government-issued photo ID.<sup>2</sup> Those without photo ID are disproportionately the elderly, students, women, people with disabilities, low-income people and people of color.

In the 2004 Current Population Survey, registered Asian American voters were 8.5 percent less likely to say that they voted in states requiring a form of identification to vote compared to states where one only must give one's name.

Most other states already allow no reason absentee voting for all voters by mail or online. Additionally, claims that no reason absentee voting increases voter fraud is unfounded. House Bill 5060 fundamentally limits the very purpose of expanding no reason absentee voting to all voters by maintaining preferential treatment to a select few who may apply by mail or online.

Senate Bill 751 goes against what the United States stands for by creating barriers to involvement in democracy for marginalized communities across the state. APIA Vote-Michigan stands against unnecessary impediments to a constitutional right for all citizens.

The state of Michigan would be better served and represented by bills that support the democratic process rather than those that create barriers to equitable participation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I hope this committee will take our concerns into consideration. Thank you for your time.

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<sup>2</sup> "Citizens without proof: Survey of Americans' possession of documentary proof of citizenship and photo identification," Brennan Center for Justice, November 2006.